



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

Eucharistic Symbols of Bread and Wine



Abram Being Presented with Bread and Wine by Melchizedek
School of Pierre Courteys, 1580. [Public domain](#).



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer below.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.



Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group. The environment for this session should include a cross, candle, icon of Last Supper, loaf of bread and flagon of wine.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana
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Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Catechist continues:

Jesus took, blessed, broke, and gave bread to his followers when he fed the multitudes. This action is reminiscent of what he did at the Last Supper. He took, blessed broke and gave the bread to his disciples. He took, blessed, and shared the cup of wine, the cup of his blood, with his disciples. In order to understand the Eucharist, we must first understand the fullness of meaning behind the sacramental symbols of bread and wine.



Sharing Human Experience

Today we will explore those two symbols that are integral to this sacrament.

Catechist leads participants in a small group sharing exercise. Break into small groups (three or four). Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in the wider group.

- ▶ When you see a loaf of bread and a cup of wine on the table, what does it evoke in you?
- ▶ Why is bread and wine such an integral part of human socializing?

Symbol: Bread and Wine

- ▶ Everyone thinks that what incorporates a person fully into the Catholic Church is baptism. That is only partially correct.
- ▶ We speak of those who participate at the Eucharist as being in “full communion with the Catholic Church”.
- ▶ Catholics possess a beautiful theology of Eucharist.
- ▶ It is the heart of Catholicism.

Catechist invites a parishioner to share what Eucharist means to him or her. Catechist shares his or her experience of Eucharist as well. See appendix # 1.



Catechist continues:

- ▶ All believers come to the table to be nourished by Christ's body and blood in order to go out and live his life in the world.
- ▶ We pour ourselves out for others; we become bread in the world so we can come back to the Lord's Table week after week, over and over again, depleted and in need of eucharistic filling.

Catechist breaks a portion of bread, holds it up for all to see, and then presents the following.

- ▶ Bread, food for our bodies and wine, drink of refreshment, celebration and merriment—they are the stuff of life. These symbols assume a new reality in the Eucharist.
- ▶ They are not only reminders of physical nourishment but they become food for the soul.
- ▶ We bring our gifts of bread and wine, made by human hands, and we ask God to bless them and make them holy.
- ▶ We ask that the Holy Spirit change these elements into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ We believe it happens every time the Church gathers to tell the story and pray the blessing prayers of thanks and praise.
- ▶ Bread is a sign of God's providence and protection throughout Scripture. It is a sign of nourishment, freedom from hunger, and satisfaction for the soul's longing for God.
- ▶ Bread is a sign of our very sustenance, our need for food—everyday food and spiritual food.
- ▶ Bread, broken and shared, is a sign that we place our lives completely in God's care.
- ▶ Wine, as symbol (symbol that expresses reality) of Jesus' blood, is a sign of his life force poured out for humanity in atonement for sin.
- ▶ We become the bread we receive. We allow ourselves to be poured out as a libation. Christ's broken body was given up; his blood was poured out for the entire world.
- ▶ Christ's sacrifice is made manifest to us; it takes place upon the altar every time we take the bread, bless it, break it, and share it. Thus, we too become broken, blessed, and shared.

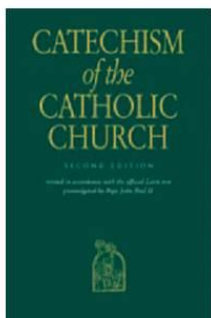
Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question in the wider group.

- ▶ God never abandons us or leaves us to fend for ourselves.
- ▶ He gives us what we need to enter into relationship with him.
- ▶ What feeds the spiritual journey of those not yet ready to come to the table of the Lord (for example, those preparing for entrance into the Church, those unable to come to the table for various reasons)?

Catechist elicits their responses such as:

- ✓ The Word of God.
- ✓ Christ is as present in his word proclaimed at Mass as he is in the elements of bread and wine in the Eucharist (while he is pre-eminently present in the Eucharist).
- ✓ Participants may also respond that they are fed by the witness of other Christians and the support of the Christian community.

The goal here is to illustrate that God has not abandoned them in spite of the fact that some are unable to come to the Lord's Table. God still gifts them with his presence until such time they are able to participate



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

fully in the Eucharist.

Refer to articles 1333-1344.

Bread:

- ▶ The symbol of bread is the heart of our Catholic identity. We are a eucharistic people.
- ▶ We consume Christ in the eucharistic bread and in the process we, as St. Augustine reminded us, become what we have received.
- ▶ We take, bless, break, and share the bread of life and in the process we are taken, blessed broken and shared for one another, our lives are poured out as a libation as St. Paul so aptly insisted.
- ▶ Why is bread used as a sacramental sign of Christ's presence?
 - Why did Jesus use bread as a sign of his presence?
 - Bread had a rich heritage and much meaning associated with it.
 - Both then and today, it was an important social symbol in everyday life.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Consider bread in the context of everyday life—what is it about bread and wine that might make them a natural symbol of God's presence?

Catechist divides easel paper in half. On one half write: BREAD IN EVERYDAY LIFE. On the other half write: WINE IN EVERYDAY LIFE. Write the group's responses in the appropriate place on the sheet. Wrap up their exercise by reviewing their responses such as:

- ✓ Bread is the staff of life.
- ✓ Bread offers nourishment.
- ✓ With bread, we are nourished; without bread, we go hungry.
- ✓ Bread gives us strength for living.
- ✓ Bread is filled with the necessary nutrients for life.
- ✓ Bread is a complement to every meal.

- ✓ Bread and water is all that is needed for life.
- ✓ Bread, symbol of food, is necessary for life.
- ✓ Wine is a symbol of fun, festivity, and merriment.
- ✓ Wine loosens the spirit.
- ✓ Too much wine can be devastating.
- ✓ Wine stresses the importance of celebration.
- ✓ Good wine enhances a meal.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ The same thing we said about bread could be said about God.
- ▶ God is the staff of life
- ▶ God offers all the nourishment we need.
- ▶ With God, we are spiritually nourished; without God, we are spiritually starved.
- ▶ God gives us strength for living.
- ▶ God gives us all the spiritual nutrients we need to be in relationship with him.
- ▶ God is necessary for life.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following.

- ▶ Are there any stories in the Bible in which bread and wine play a significant role?

Catechist creates another easel paper and places the following words at the top of the sheet: **STORIES OF BREAD AND WINE IN THE BIBLE**. Catechist invites participants to list various stories in which bread and wine had a significant role such as

- ✓ Passover
- ✓ Manna in the desert
- ✓ Elijah in the desert under the broom tree
- ✓ Jesus and the Last Supper

Catechist poses this question to the group:

- ▶ What spiritual meaning was associated with bread and wine in the Bible?

Biblical Signs of Bread and Wine

Old Testament (refer to CCC #1150)

- ▶ The word “bread” in the Bible had many significant spiritual meanings. It was a general reference for food itself. The Old Testament used the word as a reference to and sign of hospitality.
- ▶ Melchizedek extended the gift of bread to Abraham, and Abraham gave it to strangers as a sign of hospitality. (See art work above.)
- ▶ Parties who shared bread were assumed to be in covenant relationship. To betray someone with whom bread had been broken was a serious infraction. David used this principle cleverly to deceive the enemies of his son Absalom. Once bread was broken between them, it would be a most serious grievance to plot against Absalom.
- ▶ Rather than putting pen to paper or quill to scroll, contracts were forged and entered into through the ritual of breaking bread.
- ▶ The people of Israel expressed their covenant relationship with God that was forged at Mount Sinai with the annual Passover supper in which bread and wine both had significant roles in the supper.

- ▶ Passover recalled the Exodus event. In one vignette of the Exodus story, God shows his providential care for the people by providing manna in the desert.
- ▶ The bread of Exodus was unleavened bread. The people had to be ready to move at a moment's notice. There was no time for the bread to rise, thus they used unleavened bread. One of the reasons for unleavened bread was to express a theology of constant and immediate readiness and openness to God's call and initiative.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question.

- ▶ God invites us to be ready to meet him when he comes, to be ready and willing to follow his initiative no matter where that might take us, to be ready in a moment's notice to do what he asks of us. Are you ready to respond to God in such a way? If not why not? What would it take to become willing?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Unleavened bread was used in Israel's ritual worship. Unleavened bread was used as a remembrance of the Exodus. It denoted the reality of a pilgrim people constantly on the move, journeying toward their destination, the Promised Land. All other forms of bread were considered ritually impure.
- ▶ The bread used in the celebration of Eucharist is also unleavened. Bread, therefore, was a sign of God's providential care for Israel and the people's trust in God. Bread was a sign of the manna God provided in the desert—and of the reciprocal covenant relationship with the people of Israel.
- ▶ That covenant was renewed on every Sabbath as 12 flour cakes were placed on a table in the holy of holies.
- ▶ The Prophet Isaiah used the image of banquet (always a subliminal reference to bread) to refer to the coming of the day of the Lord, the end times.
- ▶ Wine was an essential part of every meal in the Old Testament. A cup of wine was reserved for the prophet Elijah at the annual Passover meal. It was believed his return would precede the coming of the messiah.
- ▶ The belief in blood as expiation for sin is associated with the sacrifice of the cup.

New Testament Bread

- ▶ Jesus eats his way through Galilee throughout Luke's Gospel. Jesus used the banquet theme as a metaphor for the end of his reign on earth. Bread is an integral symbol for Jesus. Bread is a sign of the covenant between God and humanity and it is a sign of community (Lk. 14:15).
- ▶ Jesus multiplied the loaves, a sign that his mission/reign was for the entire world. Jesus came to save everyone.
- ▶ St. Paul teaches us about the Eucharist in his letter to the Corinthians. Though we are many and though we are diverse, we are united as one body in Christ.
- ▶ Eucharist is a sign of unity and of communal sharing. Eucharist demands that we share with those who have no bread, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.
- ▶ The synoptic evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, teach that the broken bread

of the Eucharist is a sign of Christ's broken body given for the world for the salvation of all (Mt. 26: 28).

- ▶ Ultimately, bread is a sign of Christ's paschal mystery. When we participate in the Eucharist, we share in Jesus' life, mission, passion, death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit. We commit to join our lives to the daily cycle of dying and rising and offer that death and resurrection for the ongoing work of redemption that continues through the power of Christ's Holy Spirit in the world.
- ▶ Eucharist, the covenant meal of the New Testament, replaces Passover, the covenant meal of the Old Testament. Jesus is the New Passover; his meal is the new covenant meal.
- ▶ *Covenant* was one of the most important words and concepts in Judaism, yet Jesus used it only once; he used it in reference to the Eucharist he established at the Last Supper.
- ▶ Jesus is the Bread of Presence. Jesus is present to us in his absence. No one who eats Jesus' bread will ever know spiritual hunger again.

Wine

- ▶ Wine/blood is a sign that Christ shed his blood for the sins of the world.
- ▶ Wine/blood is equated with the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 24:27, 28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20), and the conferral of eternal life.
- ▶ The blood of Christ in the gospels is understood as a sign that Jesus shed his blood for the sins of the world.
- ▶ This is why the Eucharist is considered a primary sacrament of reconciliation.
- ▶ Bread and wine were not just arbitrarily chosen by Jesus to be a sign of his presence. Both bread and wine were already laden with a depth of meaning in the Scriptures that Jesus knew.

(cf. Birmingham, Mary. *Word and Worship Workbook, Year B*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 334-335.)

Catechist invites participants to summarize briefly what they just heard in the wider group.

REVIEW: Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in the wider group.

- ▶ What are some of the meanings associated with bread and wine in the Bible?
- ▶ Why did Jesus choose these meaningful symbols to be a sign of his presence?
- ▶ Considering how the Bible understood the sign of bread and wine, choose one thing you just heard that connects with a hunger you have for the Eucharist (whether you already share at the Lord's Table or are preparing to do so).



For example, it gives me great joy to know that when I come to the eucharistic table, I am not just spiritually feeding myself but I am privileged to participate in the ongoing work of Jesus in the world. I am privileged to become what I receive to go out and give Jesus to others. It gives great meaning to my life. Refer to appendix #1.

Liturgical Use of the Symbols of Bread And Wine

- ▶ The Church teaches us that our sacrament symbols are to be big, robust, and clearly express what they signify. In other words, real bread and wine is to be used.
- ▶ Very important: When the Church uses symbols they do not simply remind us of what they represent. They embody what they represent. Refer to appendix #2: How a symbol functions.
- ▶ Bread is not a reminder of Christ's broken body; eucharistic bread *is* Christ's broken body.
- ▶ Wine is not a reminder of Christ's blood poured out, eucharistic wine *is* his blood poured out for all in our midst; it is the sacramental forgiveness of sins.
- ▶ When Communion is given under both forms, bread and wine, the Church reminds us that it is the complete form. We are told that this manner of sharing in Communion reveals more fully the sign of the eucharistic banquet (cf. Directory for the Celebration of Communion Under Both Kinds, #18).
- ▶ It is also important to know that Christ is completely whole and present in form of Communion by itself. In other words, the totality of Christ's presence, body, soul, and divinity is in the eucharistic bread and in the eucharistic wine respectively.
- ▶ Christ's body and blood are present to us in the eucharistic bread alone or in the eucharistic wine alone.
- ▶ Drinking from the eucharistic cup is the fullest sign of the covenant that Christ ratified by shedding his blood.
- ▶ Our participation at the Lord's Table strengthens us and calls us to go out and allow our bodies to be broken and our blood to be shed for others.
- ▶ When we eat the Bread of Life and drink the Cup of Salvation, we participate in the sacrifice of Jesus that was made present on our altar of sacrifice.
- ▶ There is an ancient symbol of Eucharist that speaks of the mystery we just celebrated. A mother pelican is pictured with droplets of blood dripping from her breast. It was believed that in time of famine, the mother pelican would scratch her breast until droplets of blood dripped into her starving babies anxiously waiting beaks. Her babies fed off of her freely offered blood. When we receive Eucharist in the form of bread and wine, we go forth willing and strengthened to offer our droplets of love in service of God's people.



Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Eucharist is not a personal, spiritual filling station in order for the individual to receive private, personal blessings. Yes, it strengthens us, nourishes us, fills us with Christ himself, but it demands a response from us as well.
- ▶ That response is to go forth from the sacred liturgy to nourish, feed and strengthen others with the Christ that lives within each one of us—the Christ we received in the Eucharist.

Option: share the anecdotal story in Appendix #3. Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in dyads and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ St. Augustine told us that we are to become what we have received.
 - What does that mean to you?
 - What does it mean that you are to become the body and blood of Christ?
 - What are the implications of Augustine's statement for the way you live your Christian life? Give concrete examples.
 - How might you become what you receive?
- ▶ Who in your life right now needs you to be the body and blood of Christ for them?
- ▶ What is going on in your local world right now that cries out for you to go forth and be bread, to go forth and shed your blood (joblessness, homelessness, health issues, and so forth)?



Community Connections

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity and makes arrangements of group participation. What is taking place in the parish community that will give you the opportunity to offer your body and blood in the service of God's people?

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following challenge by sharing with one other person.

- ▶ What is the challenge of the Church's teaching regarding the eucharistic symbols of bread and wine?
- ▶ In what way does this teaching invite you to live more fully the paschal mystery?
- ▶ Is there an attitude or behavior in need of transformation? If so, what is it and what are you willing to do about it?
- ▶ Is there someone in your life whom you should nourish with Christ's life but whom you choose instead to ignore or worse, treat badly?
- ▶ In what way does this teaching concretely invite you to live the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection that is present in the celebration of the Eucharist?

If this is a catechumenal setting, the catechist reminds those present about the opportunities Catholics have to go to Mass, daily and Sunday.

- ✓ Name the Mass schedules.
- ✓ Tell them how some people go to Mass every day.
- ✓ Remind them that when we die, the primary sacrament we are given is the Eucharist, food for the journey. It is called viaticum.
- ✓ Remind them that participation in the Mass every Sunday is not just one of the Ten Commandments; it is also one of the precepts of the Church.

Journal

Questions for your journal throughout the week: Assess the way you encounter the people in your world throughout the week.

- ▶ What is your attitude toward them?
- ▶ Do you nourish them or do you starve them?
- ▶ What are some core issues that need to be healed if you are to be an effective Christ-bearer in your world?



Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology (“Glory be to the Father...”), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

Option 2: Use this prayer:

If you have bread and wine in the environment, center your prayer on these symbols. Catechist enlists the aid of sponsors to lift up and break the bread as you pray this blessing prayer. Have them break in to pieces for everyone.

Leader:

Lord, you are the Giver of Life.
You feed us with your Presence.
You provide for all your creatures,
the birds in the air, the fish in the sea,
animals in our forests
and human beings on the earth.

We praise you and bless you for the daily food we are about to receive.
May it provide nourishment for our bodies.

As we break this bread and drink from this cup
let us be reminded of our brothers and sisters who are hungry this day.
Give us the grace and strength
to go from this place to feed them and to be food for them.

Blessed are you, Lord God almighty.
You give us our daily food,
for this we give you praise, honor, and glory.

Blessed are you, Lord Jesus,
the only Son of God our Father,
you continue to feed us with your presence and your holy Word.

Blessed are you, Life-giving Spirit,
your presence sustains us,
empowers us and sends us out to be bread for the world.

Tray with broken bread and cup of wine is presented.

As a foretaste of the Eucharist that is to come for those who are not yet fully initiated, and as a reminder of the weekly banquet we share for those who are fully initiated, and as reminder of the responsibility that goes with it, let us share our daily bread and drink from a common cup.

May this bread and wine be a sign of God's love for us,
our love for God and one another
and of the hospitality we are called to extend to all of God's people.

We invite you to come forward in pairs, give a piece of bread to your partner and say:

► "May Christ feed you with his love."

Each person gives a piece to their partner.

Let us now share this blessing cup as a sign of our friendship, unity, and love of Christ.

Pass the cup to each person—pass with a cloth to wipe it clean.

Intercessions (All stand)

- For all who are preparing to celebrate the sacrament of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. May their preparation be a time of deep conversion in their lives. We pray to the Lord.
- For all who are hearing the call of faith for the first time, that the Spirit of God continues to light a fire in their hearts, we pray to the Lord.
- For all the sick, suffering, homeless, depressed, hungry and brokenhearted people in our midst and in the world. May they be touched by the mercy and healing love of God and by service of compassionate Christians, we pray to the Lord.
- For _____, _____, may God be with them in this difficult time.

Concluding prayer

Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth,
Complete in us the great work you have begun.
Help us to become your bread in the world.
Teach us what it means to die and rise for the sake of the gospel.
Guide us as we strive to become what we have received in the Eucharist.

May we proclaim your word by our effective words and actions.
May we trust in your mercy and strength
to go with us as we live as eucharistic people in the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Let us bless the Lord, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Let us go in the peace of Christ.

Appendix

1. MY STORY

Eucharistic wine is the life-force that runs through my veins. I do not know how I would have survived 11 years of dealing with the mental illness of a child had it not been for the strength given to me in the Eucharist, most especially the eucharistic cup, the precious blood, the eucharistic wine. Every time I drank from our common cup, my prayer was, “Lord, let your blood run through my veins and out to my child so I can minister your love to him since he cannot be here with us today.” Participation in the cup sustained me throughout each ordeal we faced. My child could not come to the table. He did not have access to its power. The only access he was afforded was through the power of Christ’s blood running through my veins and out to my son each and every day of the week. There were times the enemy disease was held at bay simply by the power of the Eucharist. Had the cup been taken from me, I would have experienced a great loss. It truly has been my life-blood! It has truly been my son’s life-blood. The healing he has experienced is nothing short of miraculous, an illustration of the power of prayer, but most importantly the power of the Eucharist.

2. HOW DOES A SACRAMENTAL SYMBOL FUNCTION?

The ancient rabbi explained how a symbol functions. He took a coin from his pocket. He broke the coin in two. He hid one piece of the coin; the other he placed in the hand of his student. He told the student, “There are two pieces of this coin that when joined together make one complete coin, one reality. One piece you can see, the other hidden. The hidden part is every bit as much a part of the truth or the reality of the coin as the part you can see. It is simply hidden. That is how a symbol works. The symbol (bread, wine, hands, oil, water) is the element one can see, touch, taste. The hidden part is the spiritual reality that is also part of the truth of the symbol.” The hidden reality of the symbol of eucharistic bread is that it is the body of Christ, the hidden part of eucharistic wine is the reality of Christ’s blood. The hidden reality of the oil of confirmation is the reality of the Holy Spirit. If a symbol could speak it would not say, “I am like,” or “I resemble that which I signify.” It would say, “I AM the reality I signify.” Symbol comes from the word, *symbolon* meaning: to throw together. The hidden, spiritual reality is “thrown together” with the concrete object to create a symbol.

3. DEVOTION

A man had great devotion for the Eucharist. Each day he knelt for an hour in adoration before the tabernacle. A woman observed the man and was so touched by his great sacrifice of praise that she decided to follow him, sure that she would be equally touched by the life of discipleship he must lead.

What she discovered scandalized her. A homeless person approached the man and asked for a dollar to buy a hamburger. He scowled at the homeless person, told him to get a job, and told him never to bother anyone again. He pushed in front of a line of people

in order to be first in line for the bus ride home. Once home, he chastised his son for leaving his bicycle on the front lawn and for constantly being so irresponsible. He yelled at his wife for not having dinner on the table in a timely manner. He got up from the table and without a word of thanks, plopped himself in front of the television, and asked his wife to wait on him hand and foot for the rest of the evening.

The woman was shaken by what she saw. The next day she approached the man and asked him, “What, kind sir, do you see in that gold tabernacle that you do not see in the homeless man on the street, the people waiting for the bus, your son who desperately needs your love, or your loving wife who waits on you hand and foot?

Eucharist calls us to take Christ to the world, to extend Christ’s love—to allow others to feed off of the love we have received.

Handout on Eucharistic Symbols

Biblical Signs of Bread and Wine

Old Testament (refer to CCC #1150)

- ▶ The word “bread” in the Bible had many significant spiritual meanings. It was a general reference for food itself. The Old Testament used the word as a reference to and sign of hospitality.
- ▶ Melchizedek extended the gift of bread to Abraham, and Abraham gave it to strangers as a sign of hospitality. (See art work above.)
- ▶ Parties who shared bread were assumed to be in covenant relationship. To betray someone with whom bread had been broken was a serious infraction. David used this principle cleverly to deceive the enemies of his son Absalom. Once bread was broken between them, it would be a most serious grievance to plot against Absalom.
- ▶ Rather than putting pen to paper or quill to scroll, contracts were forged and entered into through the ritual of breaking bread.
- ▶ The people of Israel expressed their covenant relationship with God that was forged at Mount Sinai with the annual Passover supper in which bread and wine both had significant roles in the supper.
- ▶ Passover recalled the Exodus event. In one vignette of the Exodus story, God shows his providential care for the people by providing manna in the desert.
- ▶ The bread of Exodus was unleavened bread. The people had to be ready to move at a moment’s notice. There was no time for the bread to rise, thus they used unleavened bread. One of the reasons for unleavened bread was to express a theology of constant and immediate readiness and openness to God’s call and initiative.
- ▶ Unleavened bread was used in Israel’s ritual worship. Unleavened bread was used as a remembrance of the Exodus. It denoted the reality of a pilgrim people constantly on the move, journeying toward their destination, the Promised Land. All other forms of bread were considered ritually impure.
- ▶ The bread used in the celebration of Eucharist is also unleavened. Bread, therefore, was a sign of God’s providential care for Israel and the people’s trust in God. Bread was a sign of the manna God provided in the desert—and of the reciprocal covenant relationship with the people of Israel.
- ▶ That covenant was renewed on every Sabbath as 12 flour cakes were placed on a table in the holy of holies.
- ▶ The Prophet Isaiah used the image of banquet (always a subliminal reference to bread) to refer to the coming of the day of the Lord, the end times.
- ▶ Wine was an essential part of every meal in the Old Testament. A cup of wine was reserved for the prophet Elijah at the annual Passover meal. It was believed his return would precede the coming of the messiah.
- ▶ The belief in blood as expiation for sin is associated with the sacrifice of the cup.

New Testament Bread

- ▶ Jesus eats his way through Galilee throughout Luke's Gospel. Jesus used the banquet theme as a metaphor for the end of his reign on earth. Bread is an integral symbol for Jesus. Bread is a sign of the covenant between God and humanity and it is a sign of community (Lk. 14:15).
- ▶ Jesus multiplied the loaves, a sign that his mission/reign was for the entire world. Jesus came to save everyone.
- ▶ St. Paul teaches us about the Eucharist in his letter to the Corinthians. Though we are many and though we are diverse, we are united as one body in Christ.
- ▶ Eucharist is a sign of unity and of communal sharing. Eucharist demands that we share with those who have no bread, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.
- ▶ The synoptic evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, teach that the broken bread of the Eucharist is a sign of Christ's broken body given for the world for the salvation of all (Mt. 26: 28).
- ▶ Ultimately, bread is a sign of Christ's paschal mystery. When we participate in the Eucharist, we share in Jesus' life, mission, passion, death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit. We commit to join our lives to the daily cycle of dying and rising and offer that death and resurrection for the ongoing work of redemption that continues through the power of Christ's Holy Spirit in the world.
- ▶ Eucharist, the covenant meal of the New Testament, replaces Passover, the covenant meal of the Old Testament. Jesus is the New Passover; his meal is the new covenant meal.
- ▶ *Covenant* was one of the most important words and concepts in Judaism, yet Jesus used it only once; he used it in reference to the Eucharist he established at the Last Supper.
- ▶ Jesus is the Bread of Presence. Jesus is present to us in his absence. No one who eats Jesus' bread will ever know spiritual hunger again.

Wine

- ▶ Wine/blood is a sign that Christ shed his blood for the sins of the world.
- ▶ Wine/blood is equated with the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 24:27, 28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20), and the conferral of eternal life.
- ▶ The blood of Christ in the gospels is understood as a sign that Jesus shed his blood for the sins of the world.
- ▶ This is why the Eucharist is considered a primary sacrament of reconciliation.
- ▶ Bread and wine were not just arbitrarily chosen by Jesus to be a sign of his presence. Both bread and wine were already laden with a depth of meaning in the Scriptures that Jesus knew.

(cf. Birmingham, Mary. *Word and Worship Workbook, Year B*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 334-335.)

Liturgical Use of the Symbols of Bread And Wine

- ▶ The Church teaches us that our sacrament symbols are to be big, robust, and clearly express what they signify. In other words, real bread and wine is to be used.
- ▶ Very important: When the Church uses symbols they do not simply remind us of what they represent. They embody what they represent. Refer to appendix #2: How a symbol functions.
- ▶ Bread is not a reminder of Christ's broken body; Eucharistic bread *is* Christ's broken body.
- ▶ Wine is not a reminder of Christ's blood poured out, Eucharistic wine *is* his blood poured out for all in our midst; it is the sacramental forgiveness of sins.
- ▶ When Communion is given under both forms, bread and wine, the Church reminds us that it is the complete form. We are told that this manner of sharing in Communion reveals more fully the sign of the Eucharistic banquet (cf. Directory for the Celebration of Communion Under Both Kinds, #18).
- ▶ It is also important to know that Christ is completely whole and present in form of Communion by itself. In other words, the totality of Christ's presence, body, soul, and divinity is in the Eucharistic bread and in the Eucharistic wine respectively.
- ▶ Christ's body and blood are present to us in the Eucharistic bread alone or in the Eucharistic wine alone.
- ▶ Drinking from the Eucharistic cup is the fullest sign of the covenant that Christ ratified by shedding his blood.
- ▶ Our participation at the Lord's Table strengthens us and calls us to go out and allow our bodies to be broken and our blood to be shed for others.
- ▶ When we eat the Bread of Life and drink the Cup of Salvation, we participate in the sacrifice of Jesus that was made present on our altar of sacrifice.
- ▶ There is an ancient symbol of Eucharist that speaks of the mystery we just celebrated. A mother pelican is pictured with droplets of blood dripping from her breast. It was believed that in time of famine, the mother pelican would scratch her breast until droplets of blood dripped into her starving babies anxiously waiting beaks. Her babies fed off of her freely offered blood. When we receive Eucharist in the form of bread and wine, we go forth willing and strengthened to offer our droplets of love in service of God's people.